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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the differences in language patterns in classroom conversations between university students of English for academic purposes and two native speakers: the teacher and a native English-speaking student selected to provide English speech practice. Transcripts of role-play interactions in two groups (one assisted by the teacher, one by the student native speaker) over a 6-week period were analyzed for patterns of error correction, metalinguistic talk, and misunderstandings and resulting negotiation of meaning. Results suggest that interactions between learners and native speakers were different in several respects. The group with the instructor spent more time talking about the role-card text itself, both language and content, and roughly equal amounts of time strategic and language aspects of the role-playing task. The group working with the native-speaking student focused mainly on the task they faced and how they should approach it strategically rather than on what they would say. (Contains 9 references.) (MSE)

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Classroom Transcripts and "Noticing" in Teacher Education

Tony Lynch

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FL 025 390

CLASSROOM TRANSCRIPTS AND 'NOTICING' IN TEACHER EDUCATION

Tony Lynch (IALS)

Abstract

The focus of this paper is on raising teachers' awareness of what language learners do in and with the target language, rather than on the language that we produce as teachers in managing the classroom process. My interest in the potential of transcripts arises from an on-going study of native/non-native talk in IALS speaking classes. I briefly explain the background to that study, then present two extracts from transcripts of a particular type of group work, and finally suggest ways of using classroom transcripts in pre-service and in-service teacher education.

1. Introduction

For the last two summers (1996 and 1997), IALS has employed a native-speaker course assistant on its pre-sessional English for Academic Purposes course. The suggestion that we should take on an additional native speaker had originally come from students on previous EAP courses, who had seen a need to increase their opportunities to talk English outside class. Those who made the suggestion were clear - indeed, adamant! - that the additional person should not be a teacher. They wanted what they called an 'ordinary', 'normal' native speaker, who would offer conversation practice to supplement the types of interaction already available to them in EAP lessons.

The theoretical literature provides support, from authors such as Swain (1995) and Pica, Lincoln-Porter, Paninos and Linnell (1996), for the argument that, though learner-to-learner interaction provides a useful platform for negotiated input, output and feedback, interaction with a fully competent speaker of the L2 is more likely to 'push' the learners to gain in terms of accuracy and proficiency. On this basis, two native speakers in the classroom are arguably better than one, since they potentially double the opportunities for such beneficial interaction.

Our course assistant (CA) in both years has been a Scottish student on an undergraduate course at Strathclyde University. In summer 1996 her contribution to the course took three forms: (1) she participated in twice-weekly speaking lessons with each class; (2) she talked to the students during the class's weekly review; and (3) she was available as a conversation partner during the students' mid-morning break.

2. The study

My study focuses on the first type of contribution, in speaking classes during the 1996 course, and compares how the students interacted in their classroom with the two native speakers - tutor and CA - as they rehearsed 'scenarios' from academic life (Lynch and Anderson 1992). The classroom procedure involves five stages:

Stage 1 - the class is divided in two and each half is given a role card; they discuss how they are going to approach the problem and rehearse what they might say;

Stage 2 - one player is chosen by each group and they play out the scenario in front of the class;

Stage 3 - after their performance the players return to their group for debriefing;

Stage 4 - a second pair of players play out a public performance;

Stage 5 - the teacher leads plenary feedback discussion of the two performances.

The data for my study comprise audio-recordings of the group work stages (1 and 3), made in weeks 1-6 of the course, in two EAP classes. During these lesson stages the half-class groups sat at some distance from each other, each with their native-speaker 'consultant' - the tutor in one case and the CA in the other. I taped the resulting interaction on two Tandberg Audio Tutor cassette recorders.

The focus of the study is on possible differences in the interaction involving the CA and the tutor. I expect to find more correction and more metalinguistic talk from the tutors, and more misunderstandings (on either side) and therefore more negotiation of meaning in talk with the CA. As well as making weekly classroom recordings, I asked the students to complete a questionnaire in week 6 in which they could express their perceptions and experiences of communication with their tutors and the CA in class and outside.

3. The transcripts

I have now rough-transcribed all the recordings from the six-week study period and have fine-transcribed two, which I will draw on in this paper. What struck me as I listened to the groups was the sheer complexity of learner talk in this sort of role-play, and the problem of how best to represent it. I have discussed this issue of speech representation elsewhere (Lynch 1996), in discussing how to represent teacher talk in classroom situations where a teacher may be using different voices and accents to dramatise a pedagogic point. In these scenario-based interactions, too, I found that the students were speaking in a variety of 'voices', in the sense of roles; since Stage 1 required them to plan how to express and exploit the information on their role-card, there were occasions when a student might ask questions in any of a number of speaker roles, such as:

- as the reader/understander of the content of the role-card
  (*this student has cashpoint card?*)

- as the reader-aloud of role-card text
  (*"without proper identification" + what means "proper"?*)

- as the suggester of language for the role-play
  (*can I say? + 'I don't catch your name right away' + 'would you show me your passport'*)

Hancock (1997) recently discussed the problem of representing what he calls the 'layers' of discourse, in the sense of on-record and off-record talk, in L2 group work. He also described instances where learners use cited language (L2 items in metalinguistic talk) and recited language (L2 words or expressions read aloud or repeated, sometimes without understanding). One can devise means of distinguishing between various sources of L2 (re)citations by students, as I did in the three examples above: using double quotation marks for direct quotations from the role-card; and using single quotes for words drawn in isolation from a student's long-term memory.

However, in the case of my role-play data, the situation is made more complex by the number of different 'voices' from which a student may select on any particular occasion and which it might be relevant to represent. There are instances of language suggested by another student, language elicited from another student, language read aloud from notes from earlier planning, language recalled from earlier planning, language elicited from the native speaker, language offered by the native speaker, and language read aloud from the printed role card. (I might add in passing that the problems faced

by anyone trying to transcribe classroom talk from a cassette are considerably less than those of L2 learners trying to understand in real time the distinctions the speaker wishes to convey).

4. Interaction in group work

I will now discuss two five-minute extracts from the first week's scenario lesson featuring the higher-level class (EAP 1). The extracts are precisely parallel, in that they start 10 minutes into Stage 1, and therefore allow a direct comparison of two simultaneous interactions.

4.1 Group 1

Group 1 comprised three students working with the tutor (D): two male students (shown as A and S) from the United Arab Emirates, and a female student from Peru (M). They received this role card:

> ***Student***
> *It is the week before your course starts. A few days ago you opened an account at a bank near the university and were given a piece of paper with the account number. Access to your account is by means of a cashpoint card, which you were told would be sent to your address. It has still not arrived. The money that you brought with you is nearly finished. You call in at the bank to see if you can take any money out. You have left the account number at home. The person you speak to is not the one you saw when you opened the account. How will you explain the position to them?*

In the transcripts, I have numbered the topical 'episodes' and shown them as separate series of turns, although in fact there may have been only a minimal gap, if any, between them. The opening move in an episode is shown in bold. One case where a student tried but failed to initiate a new topic is marked with a **#** sign, instead of a number. As both extracts begin 10 minutes from the start of Stage 1, the transcripts start in mid-episode.

EXTRACT 1

1
A: first thing he ask about identity not name I think + maybe I told him any name

2
D: well yeah but we don't normally just say you know "what is your identity?"
M: no
D: we say "what is your name?"
A: hmhm
D: identity is + what you are looking for as the bank clerk + but when asking + you ask somebody's name and "do you have some means of identification?" + like passport for instance
A: hmhm
S: ID card + + + ID card
M: something what you said?
D: 'means + means of identification'
M: spell please + I don't know the word
D: just like
A: 'mean'
D: 'mean' + M-E-A-N + 'means of identification'
M: oh
D: 'means of identification' + + "do you have some means" + M-E-A-N-S
A: 'means' mean 'some'?
D: "means + of identification" + "do you have some means of identification?"
A: what's mean of 'means'?
D: + + for example a passport
A: ah
D: ID + + any particular type of identification

#

A: ok that's the first thing + second? + + +

3

S: is this from a book? + this book?

D: it's from this book yes + *Study Speaking*

A: hmhm

D: all the speaking work comes from this book

A: hmhm

D: but we don't give you the book we give you + handouts from it

S: is this written by Tony?

4

A: yes + "what's your... account number?" + + you agree? + uh what's the next question? + "what's your account number?"

S: hm + + yeah *(laughs)*

M: not bad

A: *(laughs)*

S: "when you were born?" and "how are you called?" + yes + + then you will check on the computer + your name + uh his name

5

A: after we have account number uh?

M: the last one may be + + that question + "do you have any means of identification?" + for example passport + I think for me that's the last one + we don't have to be strict

S: hmhm + + but he will feel you know you + you are suspicious

M: *(laughs)*

S: I mean you + + no sorry + I'm suspicious +

A: no you are the

S: and he's suspicious on me *(laughs)*

M: yes

6

S: how can we say that?

D: you mean the student is also suspicious of the + + ?

S: no no + uh he is thinking and suspicious

D: yeah hmhm

S: so is there any verb to describe his situation? + he's doubt + he has doubt or?

D: well no I don't think there's a specific verb you could just say you know 'he + he thinks' or 'he wonders' or 'he's not sure'

S: ah

D: if you are + suspicious or not

A: you think he think *(laughs)*

D: he thinks + +

A: ok after?

S: maybe both of us are suspicious + I mean the student and the teller *(laughs)*

M: yes *(laughs)*

A: *(laughs)*

S: "why you asking me + a lot of questions?"

M: "I just want to + open my account"

S: maybe they'll ask us + + you know they will ask us "where's the + +"

7

A: when I open account the bank don't have picture of customer or + in the bank?

D: picture?

A: yes

D: um + I think some banks do now + I think uh + + I think + is it the Royal Bank?

A: now in the card Visacard like this
D: yes but not all banks + most banks no they don't have a picture on it + + +

8
D: well I think the others + the other group is ready so + I think + **can you choose who's going to be the first** + first one to practise + which of the three + +
A: Shaheen maybe
S: maybe you *(laughs)*
M: Shaheen
D: I hope we shall have time for one more + one more after the first practice

9
A: but where we will do + uh this scenario?
D: just here + just here we'll probably just use the
A: oh there is a recorder now
D: no no it won't be + well it'll just be recorded on this + + not on the video

10
A: can I have help of my friend or... + when I go there?
D: you're on your own
Ss: *(laugh)*
S: it will be three against three
Ss: *(laugh)*
S: fighting
A: it's better *(laughs)*

11
D: who's going to be first?
A: ladies first *(laughs)* + +
M: all right + but I'm very bad
D: + don't worry + + +

12
D: *(to class)* **ok I think we are now ready**

That five-minute extract contains 12 episodes. The single line of Episode 1 shows the last of a series of turns in which the students plan the tactics for their performance. Episode 2 is initiated by the tutor D, who corrects A's **'he ask about identity not name I think'** and suggests appropriate expressions **'what is your name?'** and **'do you have some means of identification?'** Student A then tries to move on (**'ok that's the first thing + second?'**) but his attempt has to be put on hold while S asks the tutor about the source of the task material (Episode 3). Student A perseveres and initiates Episodes 4 and 5, both on tactical points. Student S then leads into Episode 6, asking the tutor for help with vocabulary; he seems to have in mind a verb like **suspect**, but is offered more general items (**think, wonder**, etc.). Episode 7 flows from a question - from student A - about banking procedures in Britain. The last five episodes in this extract (8-12) are all procedural: some are specific prompts from the tutor (8, 11 and 12) and the others are queries from student A about the procedure for this sort of task.

Summarising, we can see that almost half the topic episodes in Extract 1 are initiated by student A. He had in fact achieved the lowest entry score of the students in this class, and in the first 10 minutes of Stage 1 (prior to this extract) had asked a number of questions about the meaning of words on the role card. But in the episodes shown in Extract 1, student A's priority seems to be to sort out tactics for the performance and to clarify the task procedures. By contrast, the linguistically most proficient member of the group, student M (who had spent two years in Edinburgh some years earlier) initiates no episodes, although she does contribute actively to a number of them. All but one of the episodes

are narrowly oriented towards the task in hand; only Episode 7 goes beyond the world of the scenario, when student A asks about security procedures for opening an account at a British bank.

4.2 Group 2

The second group, working with the CA (shown as H), were assigned the role of the bank teller. They were an all-male group - one from Japan (Y), one from Saudi Arabia (F) and the third from Korea (P). They worked from the following role card:

> ***Bank teller / clerk***
> *A foreign student comes into your branch, saying that they opened an account some days ago. They have not received their cashpoint card, and want to make a cash withdrawal. You ask for the person's name. Your records show that an account has been opened in a similar name but the spelling is slightly different. This makes you suspicious. You cannot authorise a withdrawal without proper identification. The customer would have been given an account number when they opened the account, so you ask for this. As the senior staff are out at lunch, you have to decide whether or not to let the customer have any money. How can you check the student's identity without appearing to distrust them?*

EXTRACT 2

1
P: and secondly + main point
H: yes
P: for example + to explain problem
H: yes
P: and my situation
H: hmhm
P: um finally we choose the
H: finally it depends what they + say to us and what the + conclusion will be + they may refuse to give us money
F: yeah *(laughs)* maybe maybe
H: um *(laughs)* which will be a problem
P: yes
H: or + they may give us money so we'll be polite and say 'thank you'
P: yeah
H: if there's a problem then they'll maybe get angry

2
P: + + + pronunciation is very variety so + I + confusing now + because I was + + familiar with uh American pronunciation + is
H: hmhm
P: always is American + + but I arrived in January in Oxford
H: hmhm
P: I familiar with uh south + south southern southern English
H: yes
P: pronunciation + I moved uh two weeks ago it's very confusing *(laughs)*
H: and you're still + it's difficult to understand
P: I'm feeling familiar with + Scottish pronunciation
H: yes + + there might be quite a few + slang words
P: but Dennis and Gail
H: they're all English yes *(laughs)* exactly
P: *(laughs)* + +

3
H: where are you staying? + do you have a flat or a...?

P: **yeah flat**
H: **are you just on your own?**
P: **yeah**
H: **is it a private + flat?**
P: **private yeah**

4

D: *(approaches group)* **are you about ready?**
P: yeah
D: selected your first victim?
Ss: *(laugh)* + + +
P: *(to F)* you are the first + + + *(laughs)*

5

P: *(to H)* **what do you study in university?**
H: um I study French and marketing
P: French marketing?
H: French and marketing + the two
P: two subjects
Y: not marketing in France *(laughs)*
H: no not marketing in France *(laughs)*
Ss: *(laugh)*
H: yeah + + I study that in + Glasgow
P: Glasgow University
H: it's not at Glasgow University it's at Strathclyde + University
P: I didn't know that
H: Strathclyde University + there's two + universities in Glasgow it's in the centre + and it's quite + modern + new compared to Glasgow University + so I've just finished my second year + and
P: uh I thought it was very strange because you are + from Glasgow + because some people take a job at + same university
H: I know + whereas I'm working in Edinburgh
P: you are lucky
H: yes it's because um + I live + + my family + home is near Edinburgh + so + in the holidays + I would normally go + home to Haddington + well Haddington which is near Edinburgh + and um last year I also worked in Edinburgh
P: so
H: it seems a bit odd + + but I don't have um anywhere to live in Glasgow just now
P: hm
H: I don't have a flat

6

P: **but all + or most university give a job same university student or…?**
H: yes they employ their students + I was just lucky *(laughs)*
P: + + + um my friend he finished the study in Oxford University
H: hmhm
P: he applied some job in university
H: at Oxford?
P: England in England
H: hmhm
P: but they refused because + he competition between + + uh + he and that university's student
H: another student?
P: so they take + uh no + reject
H: oh a student from their university
P: from their university
H: so he didn't get the job somebody + from that university did?
P: but finally he get in + excess university
H: sorry?
P: excess + + excess

F: Essex
H: oh Essex
P: yeah Essex + yeah
H: + + it's not very
P: very unusual + unusual case + he is very lucky + he told me
H: it's + not very + fair + if they were both qualified
P: fair? + yeah fair + + but uh + generally they take their university
H: their own students + + +
P: their own students + +

7
P: *(about the other group)* **they didn't decide yet + they prefer speak**
H: it's not that bad it's fine

8
D: *(to class)* **ok I think we are now ready...**

In that extract - precisely simultaneous with the first - we see a rather different sort of interaction, with elements much more like social chat than task-focussed talk. True, there is some brief task-related talk at the beginning (Episode 1), in the middle (Episode 4) and at the end (Episodes 7 and 8), but most of the time is devoted to apparently 'off-task' topics initiated by student P (Episode 2 on accents in English, and Episodes 5 and 6 on university study and employment) with the CA contributing one topic episode on accommodation.

4.3 Differences between the group interactions

The major difference between the two extracts is the extent to which the students in Group 2, working with the CA, talk in a 'literal frame' (Goffman 1974, cited in Hancock 1997) - in other words, as themselves. Four of the eight topical episodes in Extract 2 centre on the participants' or their friends' lives (problems with English, accommodation, study and jobs), rather than in the 'non-literal frame' of roles in the course material. Contrast that with the first extract, where the only 'real-life' episode was about bank security arrangements in Britain.

The two transcripts I have discussed cover roughly a quarter of the time spent on group work in EAP 1's lesson. Table 1 below sketches the wider picture, categorising all the topical episodes from Stage 1, which amounted to some 20 minutes' of speech and a total of 73 episodes (divided almost equally between the two groups).

Table 1. Episodes in rehearsal talk (Stage 1 of scenario lesson 1, class EAP 1)

		tutor	CA
Ss in non-literal frame			
	general procedure	12	6
TEXT	content	7	2
	language	6	1
TASK	strategy	5	14
	language	5	1
Ss in literal frame			
	task-related	1	9
	"off task"	0	4
		36	37

Those figures suggest that the interaction between learners and native speaker was different in a number of respects. The group with the tutor spent more time on talking about the role-card text itself - both language and content - and roughly equal amounts of time on strategic and language aspects of the scenario task. On the other hand, the group working with the CA focussed mainly on the task they faced, and on how they should approach it strategically rather than on what they would say. There was also, as mentioned earlier, more talk in Group 2 in which the participants (CA and students) spoke in literal frame, something that was virtually absent from Group 1's interaction.

5. Implications

My study is still at an early stage and it remains to be seen whether the differences I have found between the two extracts from this particular scenario lesson will hold true for EAP 1's later lessons (and also for the lower-level class, EAP 2). But as far as the implications for teacher education are concerned, it seems to me that transcripts like these have a potential value in raising teachers' awareness of what goes on in group work. We have read a great deal recently about the importance of finding ways to help language learners to 'notice' lexico-grammatical and discoursal features of language in communication (e.g. Schmidt 1990, Swain 1995, and Thornbury 1997). It seems to me equally important that teachers should 'notice' what is going on during group work, so that we can decide whether, when and how to intervene (Lynch 1997).

Let me suggest how these particular transcripts could be used for that purpose in teacher education. On a pre-service course, one might ask trainees to categorise student contributions (initiating a new topic, answering a question, responding to a criticism, etc.); to identify episodes in which students focus on language form (e.g. resolving comprehension difficulties, such as Group 2 encountered over **Essex/excess**, or asking for lexical help from each other or the native speaker); or to evaluate the success of a student's contribution. Analysing transcripts in this way could make trainees aware of the range of participant involvement in interaction, and so help them to appreciate the need to offer learners a varied diet of classroom speaking tasks.

In an INSET workshop for more experienced teachers one might focus on an issue such as on-task and off-task talk. My suggestion for using these particular transcripts would be to issue them to workshop participants with the following question: *"If you were the teacher in this class, which of these two extracts would you be happier to overhear as you monitor the two groups?"*

I suspect that many in the teaching profession would feel that Group 1's interaction (with the tutor) represents better use of class time. The students are more clearly 'on task': they are rehearsing for the performance to come; they appear to be paying more attention to (their problems with) the language. But I would argue that the extract featuring Group 2 might well provide a more effective learning experience in the long term, since their interaction seems to carry the extra 'charge' of engagement with topics of real-life interest to the participants themselves. It could, admittedly, be objected that time spent 'just chatting' is time diverted from preparing the task, but in fact the reason Group 2 were able to move on to talking about real life is that they had already finished the rehearsal task they had been set. The CA had chivvied them through the preparation by asking them what they were going to do and say, while the tutor preferred to allow his group the time and space to work things out for themselves. It seems to me that either approach might be appropriate, depending on the aims of the lesson. An INSET workshop based on discussion of these transcripts could focus on this issue of whether off-task talk is 'off the point'.

My argument here is simply that professional discussion of that sort of issue can be facilitated by access to transcripts, which provide a sufficiently detailed basis for analysis, interpretation and debate. They enable us, literally, to see the point: to recognise learners' ideas and expressions that would inevitably escape the notice of the real-time observer. Providing we can find satisfactory ways

of reflecting the complexities of features such as 'layer' and 'voice', classroom transcripts offer great potential for our development of, and as, teachers.

Note

This paper is a revised version of a presentation given at the 5th IALS Symposium for Language Teacher Educators in November 1997.

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